**The Authentic Concept of God in Hinduism: Paramātman as Non-Anthropomorphic and the Evolution Towards Deities**

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**Abstract**

**Early Hindu tradition, particularly within the Śruti corpus such as the Vedas and Upaniṣads, presents a conception of divinity that is highly transcendent, formless, and non-anthropomorphic. This concept culminates in Brahman/Paramātman, the ultimate reality that is not confined to any form and cannot be represented in human or physical terms. Over time, social, cultural, and ritual developments led to a transformation toward anthropomorphic deities in Smṛti literature, Purāṇas, and the Bhakti tradition. This pattern reveals an internal dynamic similar to other religious evolutions where abstract monotheism becomes mediated through idol worship. This paper argues that the most authentic textual concept of divinity in Hinduism is the transcendent Paramātman, while the anthropomorphic and polytheistic forms represent historical evolution.**

**1. Divinity in Śruti: Formless and Transcendent**

**1.1 Brahman as Ultimate Reality**

**The Upaniṣads describe Brahman, later identified with Paramātman, as the absolute reality beyond description:**

- **"Neti neti" – *not this, not that* (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 2.3.6)**
- **"Avyaktam" – the unmanifest (Kaṭha Upaniṣad 2.18)**
- **"Na tasya pratima asti" – *there is no image or form of Him* (Yajur Veda 32.3)**

**These statements affirm a non-visual, non-human, formless divinity.**

**1.2 Paramātman in the Upaniṣads**

**The concept of Paramātman appears explicitly:**

- **Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 3.1.1: The supreme light of consciousness.**
- **Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 6.11: Formless, beyond physical attributes.**
- **Kaṭha Upaniṣad 2.20: "Finer than the finest, greater than the greatest."**

**This confirms that the highest divinity in Śruti was never conceived as anthropomorphic.**

**2. Early Vedic Divinity: Polytheism or Functional Monotheism?**

**The Ṛg Veda mentions multiple deities (Indra, Agni, Varuṇa), yet they often function in henotheistic terms—one god elevated at a time as an expression of ultimate reality:**

- **Ṛg Veda 1.164.46: *"Ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti" – Truth is one, sages call it by various names.***

**This forms a bridge toward Paramātman: the divinity is one, and deity names are functional manifestations, not independent beings.**

**3. Evolution Toward Anthropomorphism and Polytheism**

**3.1 Role of Smṛti and Purāṇas**

**By the first millennium CE, Smṛti texts—*Mahābhārata, Rāmāyaṇa,* and the Purāṇas—depicted gods in highly human-like forms:**

- **Śiva with a body, emotions, and cosmic dance**
- **Viṣṇu as avatars with human/animal forms**
- **Brahmā with four faces**

**These gods acquired psychological traits, familial structures, and even conflicts—a stark contrast to the formless Paramātman.**

**3.2 Social and Ritual Dynamics**

**Several factors drove this evolution:**

1. **Popular religious accessibility: humans relate more easily to anthropomorphic forms.**
2. **Integration of local cults and ancestral spirits into the Hindu pantheon.**
3. **Bhakti movement (6th–12th century CE): emotional devotion demanded personification.**
4. **Political-cultural sponsorship: specific deities were promoted by kings as protectors.**

**This evolution does not originate in Śruti, but reflects historical and cultural dynamics.**

**4. Distortion of Original Divine Concept: Parallel with Pre-Islamic Arabia**

**Similar dynamics occurred in ancient Arabia:**

- **The high God Allah was originally transcendent and formless.**
- **Later, idols (al-Lāt, al-'Uzzā, Manāt) became intermediaries, distorting pure monotheism.**

**Hinduism shows a parallel:**

1. **Paramātman/Brahman – universal, formless, Śruti-based**
2. **Anthropomorphic deities – personified, narrative-driven, Smṛti/Purāṇa-based**
3. **Local cults – spirits, fertility goddesses, assimilated into the pantheon**

**The transition from abstract divinity to human-like gods is a natural sociocultural evolution, not the original theology.**

**5. Paramātman as Authentic Hindu Theology**

**Textual authority establishes hierarchy:**

1. **Śruti (highest authority): Non-anthropomorphic divinity—Brahman, Paramātman, universal Atman.**
2. **Smṛti: Stories of gods, avatars, and personal divine forms.**
3. **Later tradition: Ritual, iconography, and Bhakti devotion.**

**Thus, the most authentic, original Hindu concept of God is Paramātman, while deities represent a historical and cultural adaptation.**

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**6. Conclusion**

**Textual study of Vedas and Upaniṣads demonstrates:**

1. **Authentic Hindu divinity, according to Śruti, is Paramātman/Brahman: formless, transcendent, unrepresentable.**
2. **Anthropomorphic gods and iconography developed later through Smṛti, Purāṇas, and Bhakti movements.**
3. **This evolution parallels similar patterns in other religious traditions, where abstract monotheism gave way to mediated or idol worship.**
4. **At its highest philosophical level, Hinduism is non-anthropomorphic, monistic, and spiritual, with the multiplicity of deities being a subsequent, culturally-driven layer.**